

Climate Changemakers

A new generation continues the journey to net zero



It's not just authorities, academics and businesses who are key to driving the net zero agenda. Those who will be most impacted by the climate emergency are still at school – and children, teenagers and young people are among the loudest voices calling for action.

Ahead of COP27 in Egypt in 2022, a survey of 3,000 British youngsters by [Save The Children](#) revealed that 70% of them were worried about the world they would inherit and 75% wanted the government to take stronger action on the climate and inequality crisis.

Climate Changemakers is an Oh Yes! Net Zero initiative that harnesses the enthusiasm and passion of young people, providing a positive outlet for feelings of climate anxiety and allowing them to help bring about real change in our region.

A project involving 11 secondary schools and colleges in Hull, it offers support from sustainability consultancy, C3 Group – an Oh Yes! Net Zero member – to help reduce their carbon footprint. It gives students the opportunity to get involved in researching and guiding the changes their school needs to make and encourages collaboration between schools and local businesses around green skills, mentoring and placements.

2023's project saw students from each school produce and present a video highlighting how their school was addressing the challenge of climate change.

A group of Year 8 students from Sirius Academy West researched and produced an impressive video that combined news footage and scenes from around the school to show some of the steps the academy is taking to measure and improve sustainability. They reported that 58% of the students arrive at the school by sustainable methods, including walking, cycling or taking the bus; and that all food and drink is locally sourced and supplied in recyclable packaging. The video acknowledged that this was just the start and there was a lot more to do.

Geography teacher Shawn Boatin works with the students on the Academy's Climate Changemakers programme and says that getting involved with the video and the programme in general has enthused all of the participants.

"Many of the Climate Changemakers students would like a career in climate change and so were really keen to join the programme. They all have different reasons to get involved. The region has a heavy focus on offshore wind and renewable energy, and some are interested in working on wind turbines, for example. Some of them are keen on working in the media on climate change issues, so producing the video was a great experience for them.

"We know that, as a school, we can improve, so Climate Changemakers is going to be an interesting programme for us to take part in," continues Shawn. "We have an enrichment club called Eco Warriors, which we're looking to grow. It's run by Mr Kay, the Assistant Head, and the students promote local sustainability around the school regarding litter, using reusable water bottles and so on. They also campaign for better facilities for the students to be more sustainable — they successfully pushed for more water fountains, for example.

"We hope that our Eco Warriors can get involved in the Climate Changemakers programme in the future, along with the current Changemakers cohort. We also want to link the project to Year 7s, and get the current students involved in mentoring the younger ones."



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2024 focus

The programme focus for 2024 is on sustainable buildings, and each of the schools has been assessed by C3 Group and had a bespoke carbon reduction plan produced.

"The calculations detail the school's carbon footprint, electrical consumption and gas consumption; its building performance, including energy efficiency and CO2 emissions, and gives it a score, with a roadmap showing the actions it can take to get to net zero," says Grace Chapman, Heritage Advisor for Reckitt, who leads the Climate Changemakers programme for Oh Yes! Net Zero.

"Obviously the cost and feasibility of those changes differs from school to school. Newer buildings are generally much better insulated than Victorian-era schools, for example, which will have a much longer, and potentially more costly journey ahead of them. So each school's carbon energy strategy is tailored to its own specific circumstances and requirements."

C3 Group's reports outline each school's key investment opportunities for saving carbon and reducing energy costs. Simple, relatively low-outlay solutions like energy management systems and LED lighting are achievable for most of the schools that don't already have them, and the report outlines grants and funding available to support measures like solar panels, insulation and air source heat pumps (ASHPs).

The key to the programme is getting students involved in deciding what changes should be made and in bidding for Oh Yes! Net Zero funding to make it happen. 2024's Climate Changemakers activities includes a grant application bid writing workshop, which draws on the vast experience of the NHS.

The co-ordinated approach of Climate Changemakers is designed to give schools' decarbonisation activities more clout and make them more effective.

"We're finding there are pockets of activity for schools on sustainability that businesses, local authorities and the University are offering. I'd love to pull those altogether and offer something that can have a massive impact, because everyone is working together," explains Grace. "That's what Oh Yes! Net Zero is all about."

The power of positive action

Climate anxiety – feelings of hopelessness, sadness and grief - are increasingly common in young people confronted with the realities of climate change. It's understandable that many choose to disengage and ignore the issues, believing they can't do anything to change the situation.

But by engaging positively with children and young people about climate change and the actions they can take can have the opposite effect – engaging them, inspiring them and energising them to make a difference.

Dr Lisa Jones is a Reader in Education and Director of Research at the School of Education at the University of Hull and leads on the Youth-led Adaptation to Climate Change Challenges in Vietnam (YACC) project, which has helped young people engage with the issues the country faces due to climate change. Lisa attended a recent Climate Changemakers session to explore how the learnings from the Vietnam project could reflect the challenges faced by the young people in Hull.

"It's all about a pathway to action - steps they can take to get from where we are now to where we need to be," says Lisa.

"We focused on the journey to action and what help and support they need from adults and from educators. We talked about what is possible and what might be needed to inspire others to tackle climate change.

"We find that young people have really good ideas, but they're not always listened to. The whole point of our research is that children and young people should be involved. They need to be at the table for those conversations. The young people in that room in Hull were identifying similar things to their counterparts in Vietnam, even though globally you'd think that their context is hugely different. But responding to a changing climate raises many of the same challenges, issues and barriers."

The Changemakers programme shows young people that it's not only small, individual actions like recycling and using reusable water bottles that young people can do. They can talk to their MP, get involved in their community, and come up with an idea that changes something.

"It's really important for adults and those in power to support this, and to create a space to let young people be innovative and creative," says Lisa.

"The fact that some of them will have the chance to visit parliament in Westminster is also so important. In Vietnam, although it's a more deferential society for young people, it's a very collective culture. Policymakers there have engaged with the young people on the YACC project, and some approaches within policy have changed as a direct result of their engagement.

"Young people seeing that their views and ideas matter and where possible, will be acted upon, is crucial."



Dr Lisa Jones
Director of Research



Oh Yes! Net Zero Founding Member